

## NOTES ON NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS.

## VII.

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IN continuation of previous papers<sup>1</sup> on North American birds, notes on six species are here offered. These belong to the following families: *Anatidæ*, *Aquilidæ*, *Laridæ*, *Corvidæ*, and *Mniotiltidæ*.

***Nettion carolinense*** (Gmelin).

This well-known Teal has recently been treated as a subspecies of the common Teal of Europe (*Nettion crecca*).<sup>2</sup> Our American *Nettion carolinense* in many respects very much resembles the European Teal, and, so far as we are able to determine, is, in the female, practically indistinguishable. The male of *Nettion carolinense*, however, differs from the same sex of *Nettion crecca* in the possession of a distinct, usually broad, bar on the side of the breast, and by the entire lack of white on the scapulars, both inner and outer webs. The barring of the back and flanks is much finer and less conspicuous, but this, although diagnostic, is not so trenchant as the two other characters just mentioned. In all the large series of these two birds that we have examined we have not seen a male which showed any intergradation in the white bar on the side of the breast or in the white of the scapulars. While it is, of course, true that the great similarity of color pattern and of coloration, to say nothing of osteological resemblances, indicates clearly that both these birds descended from a common ancestor, and that at no very remote period were probably connected by either individual variation or geographic intermediates, and thus

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<sup>1</sup> For the other papers in this series, cf. 'The Auk,' XXXIV, April, 1917, pp. 191-196; XXXIV, July, 1917, pp. 321-329; XXXIV, October, 1917, pp. 465-470; XXXV, January, 1918, pp. 62-65; XXXV, April, 1918, pp. 185-187; and XXXV, October, 1918, pp. 463-467.

<sup>2</sup> Committee British Ornithologists' Union, List British Birds, ed. 2, 1915, p. 171.

from a modern standpoint subspecies, they are now, in the male at least, separated by two absolutely constant characters, on account of which they should, of course, stand as distinct species.

### ***Circus cyaneus hudsonius* (Linnaeus).**

Dr. Hartert, in a recent publication,<sup>1</sup> treated the American Marsh Hawk, *Circus hudsonius* (Linnaeus), as a subspecies of the European Harrier, *Circus cyaneus* (Linnaeus). An examination of a large series of both these birds has been made with the object of determining the desirability of this change, with the following result.

The male of the American bird, *Circus hudsonius*, differs from the same sex of *Circus cyaneus* in its less uniform, darker, and more distinctly barred tail; its usually darker, less bluish (more brownish) upper surface; darker, less clearly bluish gray color throughout; and more or less barred and spotted posterior lower parts. The female is also darker, but the differences in this sex are not so distinctive. All the characters that separate *Circus hudsonius* from *Circus cyaneus* are clearly but *average*, with the exception of the spots on the posterior under surface, which appear to be nearly, if not quite, always present to a greater or less extent in the former bird. There are, however, occasional specimens of *Circus hudsonius*, which in this respect so closely approach the unspotted condition of *Circus cyaneus*, and some of *Circus cyaneus* so much like *Circus hudsonius*, that a trinomial designation best serves to express the relationship now existing between the two birds. This is apparently one of those cases of a subspecies which is in about the last stages of complete specific segregation, and which in the course of time will be entirely distinct. At present, however, our Marsh Hawk should probably stand as *Circus cyaneus hudsonius* (Linnaeus).

### ***Haliaeetus albicilla brooksi* Hume.**

Dr. Louis B. Bishop, a number of years ago, recorded the Gray Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) from Unalaska, in the Aleutian Islands, Alaska.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, Mr. A. H. Clark referred the

<sup>1</sup> Vögel paläarkt. Fauna, Heft IX (Band II, Heft 3), October, 1914, p. 1142.

<sup>2</sup> North American Fauna, No. 19, 1900, p. 73.

birds of this species from northeastern Asia and from Alaska to *Haliaetus albicilla brooksi* Hume.<sup>1</sup> The present writer, in the course of other investigations, incidentally had occasion to verify the status of this Asiatic subspecies. The result serves to substantiate Mr. Clark's statement that the Gray Sea Eagles from eastern Asia, the Commander Islands, and northern India are all so much smaller than European birds that their subspecific separation is necessary. The earliest name available for this form seems to be *Haliaetus brooksi* Hume,<sup>2</sup> described from "upper India." The Gray Sea Eagles occurring on the Aleutian Islands, or, in fact, anywhere else in Alaska, belong, of course, to this race, and their reference to *Haliaetus albicilla brooksi* Hume confirms its addition to the North American list.

#### **Larus canus brachyrhynchus** Richardson.

The American bird now called *Larus brachyrhynchus* is evidently very closely allied to the Old World *Larus canus* Linnæus. Study of a series of specimens of these two birds shows that about the only characters separating *Larus brachyrhynchus* from *Larus canus* are the average smaller size of the former, the usually greater amount of gray on the basal portion of the second and third primaries (counting from the outermost), and that this gray terminates distally in a small white or whitish spot. The difference in size and of the extent of the gray on the basal portion of these two primaries is at once seen to be merely of average character, so that the main distinction between the two supposed species is the white area on the third primary of *Larus brachyrhynchus*; and upon this rests the claim of *Larus brachyrhynchus* to specific distinctness from *Larus canus*. When sufficient material is examined, however, it becomes evident that even this character is not entirely constant, for individuals occur that quite bridge over the difference between the two forms. For example, a specimen in the Biological Survey collection, No. 193531, U. S. Nat. Mus., from Slave River, Mackenzie, collected on June 16, 1903, is, so far as its quill characters are concerned, almost perfectly typical *Larus canus*, yet it

<sup>1</sup> Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., XXXVIII, April 30, 1910, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibis, series 2, VI, No. XXIII, July, 1870, p. 438.

is undoubtedly an individual variant of *Larus brachyrhynchus*. Likewise in some specimens of Old World *Larus canus* the whitish terminal area of the gray wedge on the third primary is indicated; and a specimen of *Larus canus* from Bering Island, No. 92894, U. S. Nat. Mus., has this gray wedge almost white at its distal end. These individual differences may to some degree account for some of the records of *Larus canus* in North America, though doubtless the latter does occasionally reach our coast. In view of the above facts it seems necessary to consider *Larus brachyrhynchus* a subspecies of *Larus canus*, and its name will therefore become *Larus canus brachyrhynchus* Richardson.

### ***Corvus brachyrhynchos caurinus* Baird.**

The Crow described by Prof. S. F. Baird as *Corvus caurinus*<sup>1</sup> has been commonly considered a distinct species, although recently reduced by Mr. Ridgway<sup>2</sup> to the rank of a subspecies. Study of a large series of the Northwestern Crow, in conjunction with *Corvus brachyrhynchus hesperis*, shows that there is apparently nothing in either size or color to warrant the status of *Corvus caurinus* Baird as a distinct species. There is absolutely no difference in color between this bird and *Corvus brachyrhynchus hesperis*. The very tangible differences which separate *Corvus ossifragus* Wilson from *Corvus brachyrhynchus*, in the glossiness of the upper and lower surfaces and the lack of squamate effect of the feathers on the back, are entirely absent in *Corvus caurinus*. In fact, the only visible character to distinguish the latter from *Corvus brachyrhynchus hesperis* is its smaller size, and even this is at most only average. There is consequently no legitimate excuse for considering *Corvus caurinus* anything but a subspecies of *Corvus brachyrhynchus*, despite its somewhat different voice. It should, therefore, hereafter be called *Corvus brachyrhynchus caurinus* Baird. This, it may be noted, is in entire accord with the results of the exhaustive study of this problem made by Mr. Samuel N. Rhoads,<sup>3</sup> and also with the subsequent conclusions of Mr. H. S. Swarth.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rep. Expl. & Surv. R. R. Pac., IX, 1858, p. 569 (Fort Steilacoom, Washington).

<sup>2</sup> Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., No. 50, part III, 1904, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup> The Auk, X, No. 1, January, 1893, pp. 18-21.

<sup>4</sup> Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., X, No. 1, February 13, 1912, p. 50.

***Dendroica erithachorides castaneiceps* Ridgway.**

The Golden Warbler commonly known as *Dendroica bryanti castaneiceps* is apparently confined to the Pacific coast of Mexico and Central America from Lower California to Costa Rica. Mr. Ridgway, in his most recent review of the group,<sup>1</sup> treated this bird as a subspecies of *Dendroica bryanti* Ridgway, from the Gulf coast of Mexico and the Caribbean coast of Central America; and in this opinion most subsequent writers have followed him. Examination of available material in various museums, including much recently collected, particularly from Panama and Costa Rica, the latter partly by Mr. Ridgway himself, shows now that *Dendroica bryanti* is a subspecies of *Dendroica erithachorides* Baird, from northern Colombia and Panama, which Mr. Ridgway regarded as a distinct species. The difference between these two birds consists chiefly in the less heavily streaked breast and sides, and the thus more abruptly defined exterior margin of the rufous of the throat in *Dendroica bryanti*, together with the somewhat smaller size of the latter. Intergradation takes place both in size and in the character of the streaks on the lower parts; and there are specimens which it is difficult to assign to one race or the other. Since, therefore, *Dendroica bryanti castaneiceps* Ridgway<sup>2</sup> is but subspecifically separable from *Dendroica bryanti* Ridgway,<sup>3</sup> and as the latter, as above shown, is but a subspecies of *Dendroica erithachorides* Baird, it seems necessary to call the Mangrove Warbler of the Pacific coast of Mexico *Dendroica erithachorides castaneiceps* Ridgway.

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<sup>1</sup> Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., No. 50, part II, 1902, p. 530.

<sup>2</sup> Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., VIII, Sept. 2, 1885, p. 350, footnote (La Paz, Lower California).

<sup>3</sup> *Dendroica viellottii* var. *bryanti*, Ridgway, Amer. Nat., VII, October, 1873, p. 605 (Belize, British Honduras).